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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in the critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality

Statement submitted by the International Council of Women, the International Federation of Business and Professional Women, Soroptimist International and Zonta International, non-governmental organizations in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council; and the International Federation of University Women, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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* E/CN.6/2004/1.



The five member organizations of Project Five-0: International Federation of Business and Professional Women, International Council of Women, International Federation of University Women, Soroptimist International, and Zonta International; each in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, share the common goals of promoting women's human rights worldwide and working to advance the legal, political, economic, educational, health and professional status of women.

More than fifty-five years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, women throughout the world are still struggling to attain the equal rights and dignity for all human beings enshrined in Article 1 of the Declaration.

We have just marked the tenth anniversary of the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, where women's human rights were placed center stage on the global agenda, yet the political will to implement commitments made is lagging in many parts of the world. Gender inequality continues to have a profound effect on women, children, families and communities worldwide.

Men play a key role in bringing about gender equality since, in most societies, men exercise preponderant power in every sphere of life. It is only through a partnership of shared responsibilities and power that the removal of all obstacles to women's active participation in all spheres of public and private life that the attainment of a full and equal share for women in economic, social, cultural and political decision-making can be realized.

A critical aspect of the engagement of men and boys in promoting gender equality must be a commitment by men to address socially constructed gender roles in the family and community. As children first learn from observation, it is important that men and women share in responsibilities and decision-making, that girls and boys partake equally in family responsibilities, and that the worth and aspirations of each adult and child be respected. Community leaders, who are primarily men, should strongly support equality in families, encourage participation of women in community decision-making, and strongly censor all forms of violence against women and girls. Men must speak out against harmful practices such as sex-selection abortions, female genital mutilation, and so-called honour killings as well as all forms of violence against women and girls in the home until these violations of women's rights are abandoned.

Education is a powerful tool in the attainment of gender equality, and universal primary education is the second of the Millennium Development Goals. Men in their various roles in governments, communities and families must assume the lead in making girls' education a top priority. Because students continue to construct their societal roles throughout their education, teachers, curricula and the social culture surrounding the classroom must build and reinforce non-discrimination and gender equality.

Young men need to be educated to respect women's self-determination and to share responsibility with women in matters of parenthood and sexual and reproductive behavior. Special efforts must be directed at the behavior of men and boys to halt the spread of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Leaders at all levels, as well as parents and educators, should support positive male role models that enable boys to become gender-sensitive adults. Less rigidity and stereotyping of masculinity foster the broad social and cultural changes associated with gender equality, create options for men and boys and are likely to yield benefits in their psychological well-being.

The human rights catastrophe presented by sexual exploitation of women and girls, which includes prostitution, sex trafficking, the internet bride industry, pornography and sex tourism must be urgently addressed by men and boys, who are creating the demand for this global sex industry. Governments and all elements of society must take a vigorous role in opposing organized crime, government corruption and economic policies that support these violations of women's and girl's rights.

Men, who are the primary mediators in post-conflict negotiations and reconstruction, must ensure women's equal participation in all aspects of peace processes so that gender equality is central in the development of legislative, judicial, political, electoral, economic and social structures and in the building of lasting peace.

As men occupy a dominant role in the development of industrial policies, they need to assume a leadership role in changing the gender-based division of labour into new economic structures where women and men enjoy equal treatment, pay and power. Encouraging men to take an active role in family and household responsibilities necessitates the formulation, promotion and implementation of such measures as child and dependent care, parental leave and flexible working schemes for men and women. Moreover, exploitation and harassment of female labourers must not be tolerated.

Since men alone will not automatically change ingrained attitudes and behaviors, governments have the primary responsibility to initiate and strengthen policies and programs to protect women's rights as human rights and to advance a gender-equal society. Moreover, within their own organizational processes, governments should look to removing embedded gender hierarchies, promoting gender balance in policy making processes and bodies as well as to making senior men's commitment to gender equality visible as strategies to advance gender equality. Statistical data disaggregated by gender and age should be collected, analyzed, and used to formulate policies that target urgent gender inequality issues.

It is essential that men not be a background to women's forums and conferences where gender equality policy is discussed. Men should be encouraged to attend such meetings and to bring to the table their ideas as well as the concerns, problems, interests and aspirations of men, which are an integral part of future progress toward gender equality.

As fathers, sons, partners, brothers, relatives and friends, men and boys have a vested interest in better education for women, improvements in women's health and a system of gender equality that does not limit or damage the lives of women and girls. The collective interests of women and men must be articulated and disseminated in forms appropriate to each country and context in order to nurture a better, more equitable world.